Department of Human Services

Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, April 8,2008

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Father Accused Of Leading Police On Chase

Police: 16-Month-Old Daughter Was In Tow

POSTED: 7:06 pm EDT April 7, 2008 UPDATED: 7:56 pm EDT April 7, 2008

ROSEVILLE -- A local father was arraigned Monday on charges he lead police on two high-speed chases with his young daughter in the back seat of his SUV.

Ronald Bernardi faces several charges including fleeing and eluding, assault with a dangerous weapon and driving under the influence.

The judge set his bond at \$150,000; his preliminary examination is scheduled for April 16.

State troopers say they first tried stopping Bernardi around 11:30 a.m. on Friday.

However, they report Bernardi would not pull over and they began chasing him but stopped once he turned into a residential area in Roseville.

Later that day, investigators were able to track down Bernardi's home in Roseville. Once police got there they say he took off again.

In the second chase, both state police and Roseville officers pursued him around 3:00 p.m.

Bernardi crashed soon after on Martin Road west of Bunert in Warren.

No one was injured; the 16-month-old child was only taken to the hospital as a precaution.

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3-year-old who shot herself used gun intended for father's suicide
April 8, 2008
•
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A 3-year-old Detroit girl remained in critical condition Monday with a gunshot wound to the head.
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Kyra Gensis' father told police she shot herself Sunday with a loaded gun he left on his bed after deciding against committing suicide.
Kyra's father, whom police are not identifying, told police he was going to kill himself, but changed his mind. He said he left the loaded gura bed, and heard a single gunshot moments later.
"The child reportedly found the gun when he was not in the room," said James Tate, Detroit police spokesman. "We're still questioning both parents."
By Suzette Hackney
Find this article at: http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080408/NEWS01/804080400
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Shooting victim didn't play with guns, family says

Tuesday, April 08, 2008

By John Agar

The Grand Rapids Press

HASTINGS -- The handgun used in the apparent accidental shooting death of a 14-year-old had been in his family for decades.

Dylan Dennie, an eighth-grader at Hastings Middle School, died Sunday after being shot by a 13-year-old inside Dennie's mother's home in the 100 block of West Center Street. Police said the teens were loading and unloading the handgun, once owned by Dennie's grandmother, when the shooting occurred.

His family, who didn't want to talk about events leading to the death, dismissed suggestions he was playing with the gun. He was responsible with guns and had his hunter-safety certification, his family said.

The alleged shooter, who is believed to have called 911 after the 3:30 p.m. shooting, was placed in the custody of his mother while police investigate.

Barry County Prosecutor Thomas Evans expected to review police reports soon.

"Once the investigation is complete, we will evaluate to see if we will issue charges," Evans said.

No matter what happens with possible prosecution, he said the death of a child "is just absolutely terrible."

The boys, along with two girls, around 12, were alone in the house, "just doing kids stuff, hanging out," Hastings police Chief Jerry Sarver said.

Police said the teens had unloaded and reloaded the weapon at least one time, but the chief said there is "no indication the shooter believed the gun was loaded. ... The belief is, that there was a pointing of the handgun, and a pull of the trigger."

The rule in the house was "hands off" regarding the gun, which had been in the family since 1965, and passed down upon the grandmother's death, the chief said.

The victim's family was distraught, and left with questions. "I want it known that Dylan had the hunter-safety course," said his stepmother, Mary Dennie, who is married to his father, Donald.

"Dylan was a responsible kid when it came to guns. He didn't play with guns."

His family, which includes siblings, Mike and Amy Washburn, Adam Pleshe and Alicia Washburn, said he liked to hunt, fished a little, and was a NASCAR fan. He was active at Grace Lutheran Church, and had many friends.

"He had three nieces and a nephew that he just adored," his stepmother said. He never turned down a request to baby-sit them.

They played video games, and he taught them to play ball.

An uncle, Joe Jones, described his nephew as a "very respectful teenager," who was polite to his elders.

"He was just an all-around good kid," an aunt, Regina Rainbolt, said.

She paused, wiped tears, and said: "We're going to miss him."

Sarver said free gun locks are available at many police agencies, including Hastings police, the Barry County Sheriff's Department and the state police post in Hastings.

-- Press reporter John Tunison contributed to this story.

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APRIL 8, 2008

CLINTON TOWNSHIP: Day care center owner charged

A 39-year-old Clinton Township woman, whose license to run a day care center was suspended last week by the state, was charged Monday with first-degree child abuse for allegedly shaking a 7-month-old boy who had been in her care for just two days, police said.

Shannon Renee Jacob is expected to turn herself in on the charge, which is a felony punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Jacob ran the My Home Away From Home day care center and had a handful of other children in her care, said Capt. Richard Maierle of the Clinton Township Police Department. Police haven't fielded complaints from other parents, Maierle said.

The child's mother, of Eastpointe, picked up her son after work March 4 and found him to be lethargic, Maierle said. The woman took her son to St. John Hospital & Medical Center in Clinton Township, where a doctor said it appeared the infant had been shaken.

Maierle said the boy is recovering well at home.

Jacob's lawyer, Stephen Rabaut, could not immediately be reached for comment.

Local&Region An 'amazing adventure'

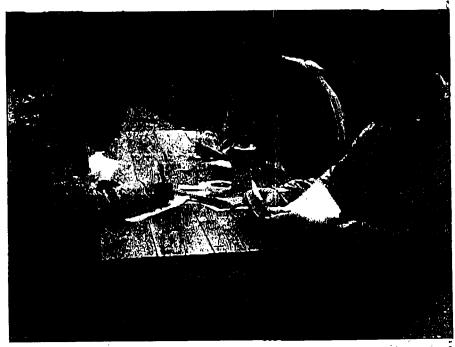
■ Youths in foster care race around campus

BIG RAPIDS - Michigan youths in foster care got to explore college options during "The Amazing Race" Saturday at Ferris State University.

Ferris and Mecosta-Osceola Department of Human Services helped encourage teenagers in the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative to consider attending a university during or after their transition out of foster care.

Foster youths spent the afternoon learning about financial aid and traveling around campus, learning about the different aspects of college life at Ferris. Afterward, participants were interviewed by Ferris sociology students doing a study on youth aging out of the foster care program.

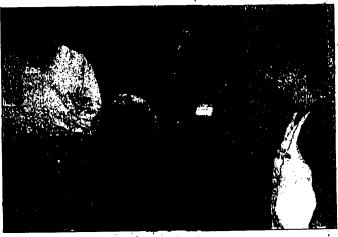
"We're trying to see if the kids are really ready for aging out, and what their needs are," said Ferris junior Jennifer Oerhli.



HEALTH MATTERS: Pecol Green and Joyce Murray take notes as Ferris senior Karl Norgan describes the Birkam Health Center.



ON THE RIGHT PATH: Pecol Green, 18, of Traverse City, and Joyce Murray, 18, of Grandville, study a map of Ferris State University as they explore it during "The Amazing Race" Saturday.



READY TO RACE: Ferris student Jennifer Oehrli (center) describes her class's sociology study on youths in foster care to Amazing Race participants. (Pioneer photos/Lindsey Wahowiak)



Teen charged with stabbing two

By MARK RANZENBERGER Sun Online Editor

A girl from Clare could face up to life in prison after being charged in connection with the stabbing of a girl and a woman in Harrison.

Kasee Marie Nicholson, 16, was arraigned Monday on two counts of assault with intent to commit murder after the two victims were stabbed early Sunday morning. Clare County Prosecuting Attorney Norm Gage charged Nicholson as an adult.

Clare County Detective Lt. Mark McClellan said a 16-year-old girl was stabbed in the chest, and a 25-year-old woman was stabbed in the neck and hand.

The girl's wounds were severe enough to require her to be taken to a downstate hospital. Authorities did not specify the hospital, and her condition wasn't released.

The 25-year-old woman was admitted to MidMichigan Medical Center-Clare.

In addition, Gage charged Nicholson with two counts of assault with intent to do great bodily harm, and two counts of assault with a dangerous weapon.

Assault with intent to do great bodily harm carries a 10-year maximum penalty. Assault with a dangerous weapon carries a four-year maximum.

McClellan, in a statement, said the 16-year-old suspect was asked to leave a residence where a party was going on late Saturday night. A fight broke out and the two victims were stabbed.

The teenage suspect fled the scene. Sheriff's deputies were not able to locate Nichelson, but contacted the youth's mother. She eventually brought her daughter to the sheriff's department Sunday.

Clare County 80th District Court Judge Gary Allen ordered Nicholson held in secure detention at the Midland County Juvenile Care Center in lieu of \$250,000 cash or surety bond.

A preliminary examination has been set for 2 p.m. April 21 in Harrison.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.themorningsun.com/stories/040808/loc_stabbing.shtml





Tuesday, April 8, 2008

Howell

Boy, 10, faces trial in sex case

Student accused of forcing 7-year-old to perform sexual act while riding school bus.

Valerie Olander / The Detroit News

HOWELL -- A 10-year-old Howell boy will go to trial April 16 on criminal sexual conduct charges following a settlement conference Monday. The boy is accused of forcing a first-grade boy to perform a sexual act while on a school bus. If found guilty, he could be put in a juvenile detention facility until age 21, and placed on the state's sex offender list until age 30.

The Prosecutor's Office did not offer a plea agreement, according to the boy's mother, whose name is not being used by The Detroit News to protect the identity of the juvenile.

Prosecutor David Morse was unavailable for comment.

An 11-year-old co-defendant last month agreed to plead no contest to a single charge of gross indecency between males in a deal with prosecutors. By pleading no contest the boy did not have to admit guilt even though the no contest plea was treated as guilt for sentencing. The boy was sentenced to two years probation and mandatory counseling.

The 10-year-old boy said Monday he would not want a plea deal because he would not want to admit to something he did not do. The boy, who was 9 when accused of forcing a first-grade boy to perform a sex act while on a Howell Public Schools' bus, has maintained his innocence.

"He has not wavered (on his account of what happened). He has said the same thing since the very beginning," his aunt said following the conference on Monday.

A police report claims the 7-year-old was seen by his mother performing the sex act on his younger brother. When asked how he learned such behavior he named the 10-year-old. The mother's boyfriend reported the incident to Southwest Elementary Principal Jill Hilla.

Witness lists submitted by the prosecution and defense attorney James Balmforth both include the names of Hilla and district Transportation Supervisor Brian Wiles. Both claim in a school district investigation that police reports were inaccurate in representing what they had told police.

Hilla claimed she did not initiate the police report because it was first reported to her as a "bullying" incident involving the 7-yearold being teased after urinating on the school bus. It was police who told her it was a sexual incident. Wiles claimed that he did not see any signs of sexual activity taking place on the school bus when reviewing videotapes, although a police report claimed otherwise.

You can reach Valerie Olander at (517) 552-5503 or volander@detnews.com.

Find this article at:

http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080408/METRO04/804080361



April 8, 2008

Boy faces trial on charges in Howell school bus sexual assault

Morning update

Associated Press

HOWELL, Mich. -- A 10-year-old Howell boy accused of forcing a first-grade boy to perform a sex act while on a school bus will go on trial next week.

The mother of the boy told The Detroit News Monday the Livingston County prosecutor's office did not offer a plea agreement. The boy said he did not want one because he's innocent of the criminal sexual conduct charges.

A judge, prosecutor and defense attorney held a settlement conference Monday. The case heads to trial April 16.

If convicted, he could be put in a juvenile detention facility until age 21 and placed on the state's sex offender registry until 30.

A plea deal was reached last month for an 11-year-old co-defendant. He received two years' probation and ordered to undergo counseling.





MACOMB COUNTY

Judge OKs statement in stabbing

BY AMBER HUNT • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • April 8, 2008

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If John Bomar stabbed his live-in girlfriend in the back last fall, it must have slipped his mind, he told authorities in an hour-long statement after his arrest.

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"She had the knife first," he told Clinton Township Police Detective William Furno. "We got to tussling in the hallway ... She gets stuck, and we kept wrestling."

Bomar's statement was played Monday for Macomb County Circuit Judge Mary Chrzanowski, who ruled that it could be used as evidence against him in his trial, which is scheduled to begin May 28.

Bomar, 58, is accused of chasing Grace Bommarito, 43, down the hallway in their apartment complex, the Peri Manor Apartments in Clinton Township, and stabbing her 10 times in October. A neighbor told police that she opened her door and saw Bomar's last stab to Bommarito's back.

The butcher knife pierced Bommarito's lung, Furno said during Bomar's interrogation.

Bomar said he didn't remember it that way.

"If I stabbed her in the back, it slipped my mind," he said.

Furno said that despite Bomar's testimony that he and his girlfriend tussled in the hallway, the only blood police found was outside of a neighbor's door about 120 feet from the couple's apartment.

Bomar disappeared for three days after the killing. He turned himself in to Livonia police after fleeing his apartment and hopping a few buses.

"I didn't mean to hurt her," Bomar told Furno during his interrogation. "I loved her."

Contact AMBER HUNT at 586-826-7267 or alhunt@freepress.com.

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Tuesday, April 8, 2008

Son held in deaths of parents in Allen Park

Tanveer Ali and Mark Hicks / The Detroit News

ALLEN PARK -- Police have a 26-year-old man in custody in connection with the shooting deaths of his parents Monday afternoon.

Justin Olszowy, 26, who lives with his parents Jerome Olszowy, 51, and Patricia Olszowy, 50 was arrested shortly after the shootings, Police Chief Dean Tamsen said.

Olszowy is slated to be arraigned Wednesday in 24th District Court in Allen Park.

The husband and wife were shot while in front of their home in the 15000 block of Meyer, near Quandt, Police Lt. Craig Kizuka said.

Jerome died at the scene about 3:40 p.m., police said. Patricia was taken to Oakwood Hospital in Dearborn, where she later died from her injuries.

Hours later, yellow police tape cordoned off the blocks surrounding the couple's two-story light brown brick home. Investigators remained at the scene, combing the area near the front door and boarding up windows.

Watching from their yards or nearby sidewalks as the sun set, residents said they were stunned by the deaths of the couple who had lived there for decades.

"It's terrible," said Erika Hill, who has lived in the neighborhood for more than 30 years. "Things like that don't happen here. It's a very quiet neighborhood with families that have been here forever."

Samantha Pedenelli, who saw police when she returned home, said some residents feared for their safety. "It's pretty scary," she said.

Neighbor Jerry Core said he often saw the couple, who had several children and grandchildren, tending their yard or decorating for Halloween.

Last week, Core greeted the husband as he sat outside.

"They were quiet, friendly people," he said. "This is definitely the worst thing that's happened here."

Find this article at:

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Father jailed after son injured

by Paula Wethington, Monroe News last modified April 07. 2008 11:31AM

A 38-year-old Monroe man who was described in police reports as having the mental ability of an 8-year-old was treated at Mercy Memorial Hospital and has been put into the care of adult protective services after the Monroe Police Department investigated a report of his father beating him with a leather belt.

The man's 62-year-old father was arrested and taken to the Monroe County jail. Charges are pending.

The beating reportedly happened between 11 a.m. and noon Friday at the family home, but police did not learn about it until several hours later when the victim was at the Arthur Lesow Community Center, 120 Eastchester St.

About 6 p.m., an officer was at the community center when someone anonymously reported that the 38-year-old man appeared to have been assaulted.

The officer went over to where the victim was and started talking to him. A swollen lower lip and an injury to his neck were visible.

Police asked the man what happened, and he said that he and his parents

were arguing about household chores. He said he started using foul language and his father struck him with a belt in punishment.

The man added that he promised not to use such language again at home.

Other police officers arrived to take photographs of the wounds, but no one knew the severity of the man's injuries were until they asked him to take off his shirt. The man had several welt marks on his upper torso, both on his chest and back. Some wounds still were bleeding.

The Monroe Fire Department was called to send an ambulance to take the man to Mercy Memorial Hospital.

While the victim was being treated, police went to his home and found both his father and stepmother. The man's legal guardian is his father.

At first, the father claimed the victim was injured during a fall down the stairs. But police reported they already had seen the wounds and said the injuries could not have happened during a fall.

The father then explained that there was a dispute about laundry chores and the son started to swear and refused to do what he was told. The father told officers, according to police reports, that he got angry and struck the son eight to 10 times while the son was lying on a bed.

Police confiscated a belt believed to have been used in the beating as evidence and took the father to the Monroe County jail.

The stepmother confirmed the details of the argument, but she blamed her stepson for causing the situation by being disrespectful. She also told police she believed the injuries were not serious enough to warrant treatment at the emergency room.

The stepmother told police, according to reports, that her stepson is no longer welcome in her home and she would no longer help care for him.

Adult protective services was contacted to provide for arrangements for alternate living conditions.

Police looking for former Ypsilanti woman who left foster home

Posted by Susan Oppat | The Ann Arbor News April 08, 2008 09:14AM

Morenci Police are looking for a woman who once lived in Ypsilanti and walked away from an adult foster care home last week shortly after she said she was going to return to Ypsilanti.

Chief Larry Weeks said Ruby Forrest, 51, was last seen on April 3. A woman matching her description was seen walking on M-52 between M-50 and US-12 about two hours after she disappeared, he said. Morenci is in southwest Lenawee County.

Weeks described Forrest as a vulnerable adult. He said she is black, has short black hair with some gray, is 5 feet $\Box 9$ inches tall, weighs 160 pounds, and was last seen wearing black pants and a pink sweater.

Weeks said she turned up at the Ypsilanti Police Department on Monday night, and police called his department. But Ypsilanti Police Chief Matt Harshberger said she walked out of the department after her guardian, Morenci Police and her foster home all refused to pick her up.

He said she left the lobby with a social worker's phone number. Harshberger said Morenci Police indicated they will pick her up if she is spotted again.

Weeks asked anyone with information about Forrest to call local police or the Morenci Police Department at 517-458-7104, or the Lenawee County Sheriff's Department at 517-263-0524.





Senior meal deliveries go on

Tuesday, April 08, 2008

GRAND RAPIDS -- A shortage of funds and food will not stop Senior Meals on Wheels deliveries this week throughout Kent County. Senior citizens who rely on the home-delivered meals will receive them, despite the shutdown this week of the Senior Meals on Wheels Pantry. The pantry is closed this week because of tight funds and a lack of supplies.

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Monday, April 7, 2008

Metro Detroit schools coping with surge of homeless children

More students than ever can't go home. Because there isn't one.

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Cherish Brisbane loved Gompers Elementary School, where she was friends with girls named Tyler, Casey and Amanda. Now she's trying to find friends at Owen Academy, her new school near the homeless shelter in Highland Park that she now calls home.

"I miss my school, and that was a good house. Plus I miss my dog, Precious. We had to give her away to somebody," said Cherish, a pretty girl with her hair pulled into a puff on top of her head. "The hardest part was I lost all my best friends."

The 8-year-old is one of a growing number of homeless children attending schools throughout Metro Detroit, where the number of children known to have no fixed address has shot up by more than 70 percent in the last three years. Cherish has lived in two shelters since her family was evicted from their Detroit home in November.

The state Department of Education estimates it's serving about 20,000 homeless students statewide, including 3,540 in Detroit alone.

And those are just the children they know about.

Experts say many parents are too embarrassed to admit they are homeless, or are afraid to ask for help out of fear their children will be taken away and placed in foster care. According to Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services, homelessness that is solely attributable to poverty is not considered child neglect.

Even so, nobody at school knows Cherish lives in a shelter, not even her teacher.

"My mommy told me not to tell anybody, because it's just my business," she said.

School districts struggle

The problem is mushrooming as more Michigan families face joblessness, home foreclosures and other effects of the state's dour economy. And homelessness shakes the very foundations of childhood, making it hard for kids to stay in school and interrupting their social, emotional and academic development, experts say.

Homelessness also impacts school districts struggling to make ends meet, because federal law requires schools to assist homeless children, which includes those doubling up with relatives, living in homeless shelters or staying in cars on the street. The federal government reimburses some costs, like backpacks and school supplies, but other mandates, like transportation, are unfunded.

Susan Benson, director of homeless programs for the Oakland County Intermediate School District, estimates there could be as many as 5,000 homeless children in Oakland County, although only about 1,500 will seek services through the ISD's homeless program this year.

"We have people in cars, in motels, in campgrounds, doubled up with relatives, or even in garages or other people's basements," Benson said.

http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=Metro+Detroit+schools+coping+with+surge... 4/7/2008

The number of Oakland County schoolchildren seeking services grew from 235 in 2002-03 to 1,273 last school year. In suburban Wayne County, excluding Detroit, the number grew from 202 to 811 over the same time frame. The Macomb County ISD served 316 in 2002-03, compared with 407 last school year.

"We really have to push ourselves to understand that this is a problem that is not coming; it's here," Benson said.

Many homeless families go to great lengths to keep their kids in school. For teenagers, the choice often is between dropping out and expending extraordinary effort to stay in school.

"These parents do care about their kids, and that doesn't always come across," said Phyllis White, supervisor of the Detroit Public Schools' homeless program, which has already served 3,540 students this school year. The total for all of last school year was 3,500.

Four hours on the bus daily

Jermaine Mathews plays drums in the Pontiac Central High School marching band and dreams of attending college to become a band director. He's a typical teen in many ways, except he's one of about 60 schoolchildren living at the Doorstep homeless shelter in Highland Park.

Mathews, 18, rises at 4 a.m. each day to prepare for the two-hour bus ride to school. He has maintained a B average though he doesn't even have a place to do homework in the small room he shares with his mother and five siblings. "Here (in the shelter) it's a lot of arguing, people getting into fights, and I'll sit in my room and try to study," he said. "With the proms and the parties, I haven't had a chance to party at all; I stay here because I don't want to be the one out partying when my family's staying in a shelter." Children feel the shame of homelessness deeply, according to Carl Taylor, a sociology professor at Michigan State University who has spent more than 20 years studying children in urban communities.

"Most of these children are living moment to moment -- the whole family is -- and it's very tough for them," Taylor said. "For a student in school, when you say, 'I'm going home,' you have no home. It gets some kids off track, because they just can't handle the ordeal of homelessness.

"If you don't have a home, you don't feel 'part of' -- you have no sense of belonging," Taylor added. Mathews' siblings decided to switch to Detroit schools when they moved into the shelter, but he would rather spend four hours on the bus each day than give up marching band and his friends at Pontiac Central.

He goes to the public library in Pontiac on his way home from school most days. He studies, and gets college applications off the Internet, though he wonders how he'll pay the application fees.

Teens at the shelter are required to go to bed at 8 p.m., and there's no place to sit around or watch TV. So he focuses on school and tries to make his mom feel better.

"I try to uplift my mother's spirits, because I don't want her to feel bad. I make her laugh."

Looking for a new start

The 200-bed Doorstep shelter stands in the shadows of a burned-down apartment building at the bottom of a dead-end street. About 60 school-age children live here on a typical day; most attend Detroit Public Schools.

During the day, homeless people line up outside the locked front door, hoping for a place inside.

Those lucky enough to get in live in small rooms along long, shadowy corridors on two floors upstairs. There are community showers, and hall monitors enforce a long list of rules.

The room Cherish lives in has a bed for her mother, and bunk beds for Cherish and her 7-year-old brother, DeVaughn Davis, a first-grader at Owen.

There is no other furniture -- not a chair to sit in, not a single picture hanging on the white walls.

Cherish pulls a tote bag from under the bunk bed that contains the children's toys: a doll, doll clothes and two teddy bears for Cherish; binoculars, a plastic dinosaur, an action figure, a little truck and a big white teddy bear for DeVaughn. There are some markers and crayons.

"I always do my homework," Cherish said. "I sit on the bed, and I put the paper on my notebook so my pen doesn't poke through the mattress."

Cassandra Davis, Cherish's mother, said she spends every day looking for a job and housing.

The family lives on \$480 per month in public assistance, plus \$300 in food stamps. She's trying to save up for a deposit on an apartment.

"There are places for like \$350 with everything included but the lights, but you have to get out there and really look for it," Davis said.

"As long as I get up every day and take them to school and do what I can to find a job, I try not to stress out. I know it's going to work out."

Homeless children often are uprooted again and again as their parents seek shelter on relatives' couches, or at shelters that typically allow them to stay for only 90 days.

Cherish's family can stay at Doorstep for about four more weeks.

If her mother doesn't find a place by then, they will have to move on. That could mean another new school for Cherish and DeVaughn.

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

Find this article at: http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080407/SCHOOLS/804070387

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Hot-line figures indicate life on the street is getting tougher for young runaways

CHICAGO (AP) -- The young caller's voice is high-pitched and trembling.

Her mother's been drinking, she says. They got into a fistfight, so the girl grabbed her backpack and a cell phone and bolted, with little thought about where a 13-year-old could go on a cold night.

Hiding in an alley off her rural hometown's deserted main street, she calls the only phone number she can think of: 1-800-RUNAWAY.

"I just don't feel like I'm taken care of like a daughter should be," the girl tells the volunteer who answers the phone at the National Runaway Switchboard. She stutters between sobs and shivers.

Her story is a common one at the Chicago-based hot line, which handles well over 100,000 calls each year, many from troubled young people who are dealing with increasingly difficult issues.

National Runaway Switchboard data provided exclusively to The Associated Press shows that the overall number of young callers facing crises that jeopardized their safety rose from 13,650 in 2000 to 15,857 last year. About two-thirds of the latter figure were young people who were thinking of running away, had already done so or had been thrown out of the house.

Federally funded since the 1970s, the National Runaway Switchboard is regarded by people who work with troubled youth as an organization that provides one of the best overviews of the shadowy world of teenage runaways, which is difficult to track.

The group's statistics showed that callers are getting younger and that 6,884 crisis callers last year said they had been abused or neglected, compared with 3,860 in 2000. That is a 78 percent increase.

Some callers just want someone to talk to, about problems at home or with friends. Others who have already run away use the hot line to exchange messages with their families -- to let them know they're OK, or to arrange a free bus ticket home.

Some are desperate for a place to stay, for safety, for options.

"I'm scared of my parents, and I don't want to go back there. Please don't make me!" pleaded the 13-year-old girl who called this particular night.

The information she gave the hot line checked out. However, her name and other identifying details could not be included for this story because the National Runaway Switchboard guarantees callers confidentiality.

It also quickly became apparent to volunteer Megan McCormick -- who has been trained to spot the occasional crank call -- that this girl's fear was real.

"I know it must be really scary," said McCormick, a graduate student in social work at the University of Chicago. As they spoke, she checked the call center's extensive computer database for shelters in the girl's hometown.

The closest was in a larger city, 40 minutes away. But when McCormick called, she was told they didn't take anyone younger than 14.

Such scenarios are common in many regions of the country, particularly rural areas where resources for runaways are scarce. Further complicating the matter, the Runaway Switchboard has found that more crisis callers than ever are 14 and younger -- 1,255 in that age group in 2000, compared with 1,844 last year.

"The reality is, there are not always services available for kids who are calling," says Maureen Blaha, executive director of the National Runaway Switchboard, which began as a Chicago area crisis hot line in 1971 and went national three years later. "We try to be as creative as we can be to find solutions. But there isn't always a simple answer."

Others in the youth services field concur.

They note that while the number of shelters and other organizations that help runaways have slowly increased over the decades, they have been unable to keep pace with the demand. Many institutions also lack the resources to deal with the severity of issues young people face today.

"The population is much more disturbed than the runaways who were being seen 20 or 30 years ago," says Victoria Wagner, chief executive of the National Network for Youth, a coalition of agencies that serve troubled young people. "There are more mental health issues, more substance abuse, more coming from violent home situations."

Long-standing government support for the Runaway Switchboard has been a vital component in addressing the problem, Wagner says. But, she adds, federal dollars for shelters and other services, also through the Runaway Youth Act, have remained largely stagnant since it first passed in the 1970s. So she and others are pressing Congress for more.

It's a tough sell in trying economic times. But the irony, Wagner says, is that when people are unemployed and families are struggling, young people are even more likely to have reason to

The 13-year-old girl who has called the Runaway Switchboard sounds even more anguished when McCormick tells there are no shelters in her area that will take her.

"So there's nowhere I can go?" she says in disbelief.

Several times McCormick asks about other options, but the girl says she has none.

She says her friends' parents would only take her back home. Relatives, whom she rarely sees, live out of state. And she seems even more afraid of her father than her mom, claiming that her parents divorced because he was abusive.

Even so, she has little doubt that one or both of her parents will soon be out looking for her.

That's not the case for many other runaways, who are thrown out of home for anything from being gay to exhibiting aggressive behavior.

"Ninety-eight percent of the time, it's the parents saying, 'No, take them.' They're the throwaway kids," says Bill Hogan, program manager at the Haven W. Poe Runaway Shelter in Tampa, Fla. He recently reunited a 10-year-old boy with his grandmother, who had told police to keep him.

Neglect also has changed the face of the runaway, says Kathleen Boutin, executive director of the Nevada Partnership for Homeless Youth, which is getting more requests for help from children of methamphetamine addicts.

For those 12 to 18, Nevada now has a "Right to Shelter" law, which allows organizations to provide emergency housing, food and clothing without parental consent.

Indiana is another state that recently passed a comprehensive law for homeless youth with a similar provision, but limited the age to 16 and older.

"It's a beginning," says Cynthia Smith, executive director of the Youth Service Bureau in Evansville, Ind. Right now, her area has no youth shelter -- but she hopes the new law will help change that.

In New York, however, a bill requiring safe-houses and other services for sexually exploited youth stalled in January. And in Wyoming, runaways often still spend the night in jail.

It's a mind-set that Rusty Booker, an 18-year-old former runaway from Louisville, Ky., hopes will change.

Last year, he told members of Congress how, at age 12, he ran away from an abusive home. He got help at a library affiliated with National Safe Place, an organization with more than 16,000 locations nationally where young people are put in touch with local crisis workers.

Still, many communities that want to establish Safe Places are turned down because they have few or no services to offer runaways.

Nine states have no Safe Places at all. That includes the home of the 13-year-old girl who was on the line with the Runaway Switchboard for more than an hour.

Several times, she adamantly refused to call the local sheriff or to get child protective services involved.

"All this stuff that's going on, it's just really overwhelming," she told McCormick, the call center volunteer. "I don't want my mom to go to jail. I can't do that to my family."

Eventually, though, she changed her mind. She asked McCormick to stay on the line while she spoke with a county social worker and then the sheriff.

"I've kind of run away from home," the girl told the sheriff's dispatch operator. "I need somewhere to stay."

McCormick waited on the line until a sheriff's deputy found her and picked her up. Finally, the girl was safe and members of the Runaway Switchboard staff looked relieved.

"You get used to some aspects of this," says Cori Ballew, a Runaway Switchboard supervisor who oversaw the call. "But you never get used to some of it, especially when it ends with no resolution."

Some runaways, like this one, find help of some kind, she says.

Others, faced with few choices, hang up. -----

National Runaway Switchboard: http://www.1800runaway.org

National Safe Place: http://www.nationalsafeplace.org

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http://www.theoaklandpress.com/stories/040808/loc 20080408329.shtml

Dickinson jobs' rate better than state's

By LINDA LOBECK, Staff Writer

normal:MARQUETTE — Dickinson County was one of three counties in the U.P. to record a jobless rate lower than the statewide average of 7.8 percent in February, according to figures released by the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth.

Dickinson County recorded an unemployment rate of 6.6 percent

The Upper Peninsula rate for February rose to 9.2 percent, up from 8.8 percent in January.

The U.P. rate of 7.8 percent was 1.4 percent above the state average and well above the national average of 5.2 percent for the month.

Along with Dickinson County at 6.6 percent in February, Menominee and Marquette counties also recorded lower than state averages for the month at 6.2 and 7.5 percent, respectively.

In Dickinson County, the monthly rate was slightly higher than the January unemployment and the rate a year ago, which were both a 6.3 percent.

The civilian labor force for Dickinson County totaled 14,375 with 13,425 employed and 950 unemployed.

Iron County's jobless rate in February was also up, reaching 9 percent. The unemployment rate recorded in January was 8.4 percent and 8.5 percent a year ago.

Iron County's civilian labor force totaled 5,925 with 5,400 employed and 525 unemployed.

"Jobless rates rose in February in 13 out of the 15 U.P. counties with a median increase of 0.5 percent, according to Jim Rhein, analyst in Detroit.

In Luce County, there was a modest jobless rate deduction in February to 9.1 percent, down from 9.8 percent in January.

"This was primarily due to recalls in the manufacturing sector. Menominee County led the Upper Peninsula with the lowest jobless rate in the region of 6.2 percent," Rhein said.

He added that Mackinac County recorded the highest unemployment rate in the U.P. and the state of 23.2 percent in February. Mackinac County has seasonal joblessness that always peaks in the first quarter of the year.

"Seasonal private sector job cuts in the Upper Peninsula in February are usually concentrated in the construction and retail industries. Modest job gains in February are often recorded in educational services and professional and technical services," Rhein noted.

Over the year, jobless rates rose in 13 Upper Peninsula counties by an average of a half of a percentage point. Unemployment rates edged down since February 2007 in both Menominee and Keweenaw counties.

COUNTY RATE

Menominee 6.2 percent

Dickinson 6.6 percent

Marquette 7.5 percent

Houghton 8.2 percent

Gogebic 8.5 percent

Iron 9 percent

Ontonagon 9 percent

Luce 9.1 percent

Delta 9.6 percent

Alger 11 percent

Chippewa 11 percent

Keweenaw 12.5 percent

Baraga 14.1 percent

Schoolcraft 14.4 percent

Mackinac 23.2 percent

U.P. rate 9.2 percent

Michigan 7.8 percent

U.S. rate 5.2 percent

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Washington Township Senior Center collects items

The Washington Township Senior Center, 57880 Van Dyke, is collecting a variety of items for Macomb County's Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program.

Many grandparents in the county have taken on the responsibility of raising their grandchildren full time, but many of them are not financially able to provide for all their needs. The collected items will benefit this program; the items will stay in Macomb County.

The following items will be collected through Tuesday, Dec. 2, at 4 p.m.:

l Miscellaneous articles, such as toilet paper, paper towels, Kleenex, shampoo, no-tear shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, hand soap, laundry soap, fabric softener, combs, brushes and towels.

1 New sheets for twin- and full-sized beds, pillow cases (flat or fitted) and afghans.

1 School supplies, such as paper, pencils, pens, crayons, etc.

1 Underwear and socks for boys and girls, ages 3-14.

1 Outerwear, including hats, mittens and scarves.

For more information, call the senior center at 786-0131.

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http://www.sourcenewspapers.com/stories/040608/loc_story25001.shtml